

REMARKS

Claims 1-17 remain in the application. Claims 6, 8, and 9 have been canceled without prejudice to expedite the allowance of the present application. Claims 1 and 14 are the only claims in independent form.

Applicant expresses his gratitude for courtesies extended by the Examiner during a personal interview with Applicant's representative Dr. Kenneth I. Kohn October 5, 2004.

Claims 1-17 were rejected under 35 USC § 112, second paragraph as being indefinite on the grounds that claims 1 and 14 recite the limitation "personal information." It is held that there is insufficient antecedent basis for this limitation in the claims. Applicant has amended claims 1 and 14 to positively recite that the securing device secures an item necessary for performing a service on an employee vehicle. Claim 14 has been likewise amended. Hence, it is respectfully submitted that Applicant has overcome all grounds for rejection under 35 USC § 112, second paragraph.

Independent claims 1 and 14 were rejected under 35 USC § 102(b) as being anticipated by previously cited US Patent No. 4,803,348 to Lohrey, et al. It is undisputed that the Lohrey, et al. patent discloses an automated customer interface for services involving drop off and pick up of items to be serviced. As with prior art cited in the Lohrey, et al. patent, the Lohrey, et al. patent provides for attendant free kiosk-like automated machine facilities at which a customer drops off an order and later picks up the processed order ordinarily without the necessity of any human interface. The characterizing feature of the Lohrey, et al. patent is the use of an undedicated charge card for allowing non-previous customers to be able to use the facility as opposed to prior art facilities, which required prior customers to use tokens, thereby limiting the customer population for the facility.

With more specific reference to the present invention, the Office Action cites Figure 4A as disclosing an information processing system that sends one set of information to a vendor and another set of information to an electronic debiting system. It is respectfully submitted that this is not a totally accurate reading of the disclosure of the Lohrey, et al. patent. Referring specifically to Figure 4A, an information processing system 78 is part of the complete unit 10 that interfaces information with the customer 70 and then provides that information to both the vendor 72 and the electronic debiting system 74. There is nowhere in the Lohrey, et al. patent that distinguishes information flowing between the customer and the information processing system from the information provided to either the vendor or the electronic debiting system. Reference is made to column 9, lines 23-32, which does not distinguish between the various types of information flowing. Rather, for the proper operation of the system, the financial information from the customer, which is processed by the information processing system, must go to both the electronic debiting system and the vendor. The vendor, such as a dry cleaner, video store, or the like, must end up with the financial information of the customer at the end of the transaction to allow for proper financial processing. In other words, the service provider receives both service information and financial and/or billing information. This is absolutely evidenced in Figure 5. Referring to column 10, lines 31-56, Figure 5 illustrates an example of a form of transaction record 68, which is used to record each transaction with a customer at each of the automated customer interface outlets 10. These transaction records are created by the computer and stored in memory. They are used for tracking of a customer's order throughout the history of the order and are accessed by the vendor. As shown in Figure 5, the transaction record includes the customer credit card number, the type of sensitive information that the vendor needs for record keeping purposes.

In contradistinction, amended independent claims 1 and 14 claim a securing device for securing an item necessary for performing a service on an

employee vehicle, communication device for communicating information between the securing device and a service station, and a billing system in communication with an employer benefits management system for communication and billing information to the employee benefits management system. Thus, isolation of the billing information from the service station occurs.

As discussed throughout the presently pending application, this is a critical feature of the present invention as it is highly desirable that the service professionals not be provided any financial information regarding the customer. Rather, the financial and/or billing information is solely communicated to the management station.

In other words, the present invention is characterized by a selective flow of information rather than merely a separate flow of information, the separate flow of information not being selective as to the type of information flowing therebetween. Hence, it is respectfully submitted that independent claims 1 and 14 are patentable over the cited prior art.


The remaining dependent claims are ultimately dependent upon at least one of the independent claims discussed above. References as applied against these dependent claims do not make up for the deficiencies of those references as discussed above, and the prior art references do not disclose the characterizing features of the independent claims discussed above. Hence, it is respectfully submitted that all of the pending claims are patentable over the prior art.

In conclusion, the application is in condition for allowance, which allowance is respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any fee or credit any overpayment in connection with this communication to our Deposit Account No. 11-1449.

Respectfully submitted,

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